



Lessons Learned from the BP Oil Spill Disaster

Crisis management is all about fixing the problem, not looking good. Crisis communication is a facet of crisis management to tell the public what it has a right to know while protecting the company as much as possible. Here are some lessons learned from the BP oil spill that can help you if a crisis strikes:

- **Do not define significant social or environmental issues as "public relations" issues** and try to put a spin on them. Instead, work with the public early on to find a solution to the crisis at hand. By the time BP did this, it had already lost the credibility challenge.
- **Be prepared.** Have a solid communication strategy in place in advance to deal with the unexpected. Communicate a clear and concise message. Avoid scrambling last minute to create a comprehensive crisis plan.
- **Be out in front of the news cycle** to create a visible media presence, minimizing the chance that coverage will spin out of control.
- **Set up realistic expectations and don't speculate.** BP "guessed" at the amount of escaping oil and was not even close. Don't promise what you cannot deliver in terms of solving the problem.
- **Be transparent.** Accept blame where there is blame. But don't just apologize. Make amends and move forward. BP will be doing this for years as a result of its late start on transparent communication.

How a company handles a crisis is a test of its character. Plain talk rather than cover up and spin protects you- because the truth will eventually come out, and shatter your credibility.

You can never over-communicate in a crisis but many companies have not said enough. Often, it is bad communication as much as the incident itself that damages reputation, loses customers and hurts the bottom line.

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For further information on crisis communication, contact Joe Charest at 619-884-0955.

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